

## [Hardrock Mining]

[ ??]

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

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Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Walker Winslow Date Nov. 29, 1938

Address 2069 SW Park, Portland, Oregon

Subject Folklore ([mining?]) Hardrock Mining

Name and address of informant [Hank Simms?], Odd [Fellows'?] [Home?], SE 32nd & Holgate St., Portland, Oregon

Date and time of interview Nov. 29, 1938. From 10 in the morning until 2 PM.

Place of interview Mr. [Simms'?] room at the Odd [Fellows'?] [Home.?)

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

Howard Corning, 400 Elks Bldg.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you none

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Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. The Odd [Fellows'?] [home?] for old people occupies large grounds and consists of two well-kept brick buildings, of four or five stories each. I was shown around the institution by the Superintendent and the entire establishment is clean, modern, and nicely furnished. Each of the residents has a private room and it was in Hank Simms' room that I conducted the interview. The furnishings of this room were two chairs, a bed, and a chest of drawers. There were no pictures on the walls [?] but a few of Mr. Simms' belongings on the dresser. Everything was very orderly and it was evident that Hank Simms doesn't belong to that school of elders who go in for exotic interior decoration. In spite of the comparative bareness of the room, one felt at home.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Walker [Winslow?] Date Nov. 29, 1938

Address [2069?] SW Park, Portland, Oregon

Subject Folklore (Mining)

Name and address of informant Hank Simms, Odd [Fellows'?] [Home?], [Lind & Holgate.?] Portland, Oregon

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

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1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant
10. Other points gained in interview

(1). Mr. [Hank?] Simms is an old type of westerner and resents having his family affairs pried into. He does, however, in the course of ordinary conversation, reveal many of the answers necessary to the above questions. His father, Henry [Rutton?] Simms, was born in Illinois, in 1823, and [came?] West in the gold rush of 'forty-nine. Later he took up a donation claim two miles north of the (2) town of Willamina, and it was there Hank Simms was born in the year 1852 (3). About the rest of his family and his early years on the homestead, Mr. Simms was uncommunicative and wanted to get on to talk of mining, in which I had told him I was interested. Question four (4) is answered by Mr. Simms' claim that he has lived in practically every mining town from Alaska to [Mexico?]. (5) is an yet unanswered, but Simms is a remarkably literate man.

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(6) Mr. Simms is a miner and has worked in every type of metal but [tungston?], and at every position in the mines from laborer to superintendent. (7) Mr. Simms' special skills and interests are those connected with mining [md] geology, etc. (8) Mr. Simms is an [atheist?] and from his present residence it can be assumed that he was [an?] Odd Fellow. (9) At 86, Hank Simms has the appearance of a man twenty years younger, and his only [infirmity?] seems to be a little weakness in the legs. He is a tall and somewhat handsome man, clean-shaven, with clear eyes and a steady countenance that at times [where?] [an?] ironic sort of smile. When he [loads?] his pipe you notice, with surprise, that his hands are steady and from the clearness of his voice and the delivery of his speech, you have a hard time bringing yourself to believe in his age. He has all of [his?] own teeth and though they are worn they seem strong and grip his pipe with some [determination?]. His [weight?] is about one hundred and ninety, and he is still a powerful man and one [whose?] body has not been broken by labor, but built by it. The [hearing?] is good and, except for minor [lapses?] there seem to be no flaw in his memory. (10) One of the significant things [about?] the man is his honesty about his present position, and his says that he cannot see why a person who was unsuccessful enough to end up in a home for the aged should be of interest to anybody, or why anything he could say should seem important. It would be the impression of this interviewer that Mr. Simms is an extremely reliable source of [information?] he is remarkably free from any [?] that might color his pictures of the past. Since he harbors no bitterness, his remarks on others can be given some [validity?]. When a person still living might be hurt by anything he has to say, he refuses to give the proper name. Hank Simms is the finest type of old western man.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

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Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Walker Winslow Date Nov. 29, 1938

Address [2069?] SW Park, Portland, Oregon

Subject Folklore (mining)

Name and address of informant Hank Simms, Odd [Fellows'?] [Home?], 32nd & [Holgate?] Portland, Oregon

Text: I was introduced to Hank Simms by the Superintendent of the Home and he took me to his room. At once Hank Simms asked, "Well, young fellow, what do you want [md] just some straight running off at the mouth or do you want me to guide on something special? I am a long distance talker if you give me a chance and I might take you for a long ride in the wrong direction." I told Mr. Simms that I was interested in anything that he wanted to talk about, but that I know a little about mining, and we might as well start on that. "I reckon you do know little about mining," he said, "I have followed it for fifty or sixty years and dug a shaft straight into this poor house. You can't call that very good mining. Miner's is fools and I'll bet that for every dollar lifted off the bedrock on this coast, two has been sunk back in the game. Miners are liars, too, [md] honest liars. If you question a miner's word about the claim he's working you might as well question his daughter's virtue. That is the way they stand by their lies. I have lied some tall ones in my days and there has been millions struck in this old head that no man will ever see. That's how I got where I am."

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At about this point [ th?] the conversation Mr. Simms asked me if I was religious, and when I assured him that I was not he continued by saying, "Well, then I can talk as I want and kind of let loose. Miners are God-damned fools and I been one of the worst. I have

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mined everything that they have in the West except tungston, maybe, and so if there is any special [kind?] of foolishness you want to hear about, what is it?"

I asked Mr. Simms what sort of mining he did first. He said[:?] "First time I lit out from the homestead it was to do beach mining in Southern Oregon. I'd take a run at it, starve out, and then go home until I get fed up enough to try another run. It was skimpy mining[,?] black sand, fine as flour, with gold in it no fine you couldn't see it with the naked eye. It was hard to catch and had a lot of platinum in it that we threw away in those days [md] worth fifty-sixty dollars an ounce now, but we wouldn't have no traffic with it then. There was two types of beach mining. One was with a hopper and screens [md] they called that a Long Ton, but I never worked one so I couldn't tell you much about it. The other was old, coast [sluicing?]. We didn't use regular sluice riffles but the frayed ends of the planks in the joints served for that. The fuzzy timber was just right for fine gold. No one ever got rich at beach mining that I know of, and them stories you hear about gold washing up on the [tide?] are all bull. The gold washed in on the tide, settled in pockets in the rocks and there it stayed. If you worked it out you had to wait till more settled. I know two men to take forty dollars a piece in one morning and worked out a couple of pockets it would take the tide two years to fill again. No one knows much about that kind of mining, except that it is the poorest there is. That is the last of it I did.

"George Collins, the Indian [agent?] on the [Alsea?] Indian reservation, was the best beach miner there was, and he and his two half-breed sons used to do 3 pretty well, but they never got rich at it. He mined for thirty or forty years and had beach mining down to perfection. The tide spreads the gold and there can't be any rich pockets like you find at the foot of an eroded mountain. I think that the platinum lay in some surface formation in the coast mountains, for there was a lot of it in them days, but I don't know where it has gone now. If I did I wouldn't be in the poorhouse talking to you. I quit beach mining early and went south to some of the California diggings.

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"I am a hardrock man and I learned my business at [Kormit?], California [md] up in the [Fuather?] River Country. That was a big diggings and some of the best of the old hands worked there. I learned from the ground down. You don't learn from the ground up, in that business. I can timber and cut my own [steel?] [md] could before I was twenty-five. A man had to know his business then and a foreman could tell a greenhorn like [reading?] beef from a poor ox. You didn't ask a foreman how to do anything. He told you 'go ahead and if it doesn't suit me you'll know it'. No one ever got fired in those days. If a man got criticised he knew enough to quit. There was [none?] of his sucking around you have now, and a man didn't hang onto a job like a priest to a parish. Ever one in a while he just drug down on principal and went down the road. They'd call us hobos now I guess, but in them days we was called Overland Johns and, by God, I knew ever creek and cow between here and Mexico and right back up to Alaska. You see what it has got me, but that was the way we lived in those days, and if you was a mining man there wasn't no other way around. They didn't hire the [homeguard?] and if you stayed long in one place that is what you got to be. I'll give you an example, and it [wurn't?] so long ago either. I drifted into Cornicopia one night on the late stage [md] just out shaking the smell of Portland off myself [md] and I dropped int a blind pig to warm up a [Little?]. I am not a 4 drinking man but the bartender there could see I was an old Overlander, [and?] he grinned at the sight of me. We didn't talk much and when [I?] was leaving to go to the hotel to bed he asked me, "Liking for a job old timer?" I told him that was the idea. He says, well you go see so and so in the morning , he wants a man. "What's your name?" I told him and went on to bed. The next morning I went around to see the guy he [told?] me about and he asked me a hell of a lot of questions about who I [know?] and where I worked, and I told him as much as I wanted him to know. [I?] could see that the job was in highgrade and that he wanted to know who he was hiring. Well he was just about to point my check for me, when here comes that bartender, and he says "[Say?], So an So, aren't you hiring this man. This is Hank Simms, he don't ammount to nothing and never will, but he is a hard rock from way back and so tight you have to take a ten pound sledge to drive a drill [md] tight in this [sence?] [?] a clean [minor?] - one who leaves little ore behind. (The [allusion?])

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here is unprintable). You're hired," So and so says. Well, I handled some of the steepest highgrade you ever seen for that man. I have seen the time we pulled down a stand of highgrade [that?] [would?] run 600 ounces of silver to the ton, and maybe 300 gold. I don't think the [man?] ever watched me. He trusted me and [that?] was the kind of highgrade you handle in canvas so none [of?] it will leak out. That bartender's word was better than a deacon's.

"I had a Swede working with me that couldn't leave that highgrade alone. He was an honest man I guess but there was just too [dearned?] much highgrade there for him to stand up under. The shaft ran straight back in the mountain and this highgrade ore came in [clumps?] ever so often. The way you do 5 with it is leave it hanging [md] work around it till you get in ordinary dirt again. That way the super can see it and know you aren't highgrading him. (Highgrading is stealing ore when it pays to sort it off). One day we [ran?] around a hanging of rich stuff and finished it off at quitting time. I always came out of the tunnel but Ole couldn't seem to drag himself away and about the time I got outside I knew he had weakened. I heard a crash and the Swede had brought down the hanging. When he came out he said, "We can pick it up first thing in the morning and we won't have to knock it down." An hour later the super [can?] around and said, "Ole, I am going to have to lay you off. Your a good man but I got to lay someone off and it might as well be you. I am going down the hill tonight and you can go with me for company." You couldn't leave that Swede and that highgrade in the [same?] county and the super knew it. He didn't blame the Swede, and he walked down to town with him to keep him honest. I have been too God-damned honest. People used to call me Honest Hank Simms. They ought to have said, "There goes honest Hank Simms on the way to the poorhouse."

"Besides highgrading there was a lot of salting and crooked [assaying?] want on in the early days [md] still does, I guess. I saw a lot of it [md] some of those highbinders brought ore samples clean from Mexico to salt an Oregon mine with, and a man that had ever worked this county would know it was foreign ore, but people are prone to be fools [md] that's why we got places like this. I didn't open my mouth about it many times for the



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chances are that the man who was mining on a salted claim had just as much chance as he would any place else. If he had to be digging a tunnel it didn't make much difference where, just so it was a mining country. What was worse was the crooked assayers. You'd take 6 you samples to them and they'd pitch them out the back door and tell you what they had been paid to tell you [md] that your ore was worth, say, seventy - eighty dollars an ton. You take them a piece of highgrade and they'd tell you the same thing. There was a way to get around that, though, and I showed more than one man how to do it. You'd take a half dozen samples and put them in six numbered envelopes and then take a half dozen envelopes that were empty, and when you got in the office of the assayer you split the samples between the envelopes and told him you were going to have to Government check on him, but that you wanted a hurry-up assay. You'd scare the Jesus out of him that way and he would be as honest as he was able. Most assayers were drunkards and had the jimmies so bad that they didn't know what they were doing. I saved one man [md] I won't give you his name [md] a lot of money that way. When I tell you about him you'll wonder why I did it. He was as big a fool as I [am?]. He railroaded forty years here in this state, starved his family, and spent every cent he made on mines. The only thing that ever paid him was the pension he had spent forty years staking a claim on. Miners are fools, boy [md] all of them."

"Take the way they gamble. I saw one poor galoot of a cousin Jack [md] that's a [Cornishman?] [md] come into a place with not enough clothes on him to flag a handoar. He put his last dollar down on the double O on the wheel in a gambling hall, and it hit. He was drunk and so the dealer said 'let it lay'. Double O pays thirty six to one. He did and, by God, he hit her. The house didn't have enough money to pay him more than eighteen hundred dollars. In three days all Cousin Jack had was the jimmies and no breakfast, and the next I saw him he was a bull cook in a [Morman?] camp; happy, said as soon as he made a stake he was going prospecting. A real miner never goes prospecting until he has to beg or earn his grubstake the had way. He'd no more take mining money and do that than a Catholic would save with Holy water. I was a little different 7 but you see what it has

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got me. Ever time I start to get wise you point out to me where I am, I'll tell you a story of a model man, though - [you?] know the kind[:?] never drink or gamble. They go to church every Sunday and pray ever once in a while. Good men [md] it's just their way. I whored around [md] they went to church.

"Well this one model man had a claim in about a mile of mine, down in Southern Oregon, forty years ago. He worked it hard and kept his nose clean and before the diggings broke up he sold it for a thousand dollars. The rest of us stayed till the diggings played out. I figure that man would [amount?] to something. When last I heard of him he was an honest farmer, doing a little mining on the side, and raising a family. When I came in here I was sitting down in the hall one day waiting for someone and there was an old [dodger?] sitting next to me and we got to talking. He knew something about Southern Oregon, and so we swapped names back and forth to see who could stir up the most live ones. Finally I played the model man at him. I says, "Have you ever heard what happened to Cliff Paine, he must be a deacon by now and rich." I was talking to Cliff Paine. You want to call on him, he'll tell you the other side of the story. He's here in the poorhouse.

In questioning Mr. Simms I learned that he had worked in every mine in Oregon, almost, and that he has a remarkable memory, if you ask him about a specific place. He thinks that with the aid of an outline map he could place most of the famous [mines?]. He worked in [Sumptor?] in its later days, but didn't think much of the place or its one-horse [molter?]. He should be talked to on specific subjects, as information is needed. Though quite willing to talk he isn't a man who is given to wild statements concerning things that should be kept in the [realm?] of the reasonable. When I asked him about the [lingo?] of the hardrock miners he said that I would have to 'pan it out of his talk', that he couldn't give it to me. He has quite a knowledge of geology and a good vocabulary. In summing up mining he said that it was a guessing game, and that in the end it 'didn't spell anything.' [As?] an illustration he pointed out instances of miners getting their leads from [oldrvoyants?]. His

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last big job was up in [?] where he quit because he 'could pitch a biscuit out the [kibchen?] door and hit a glacier.'

I am going to continue the interview.

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Walker Winslow Date Nov. 29, 1938

Address 2069 SW Park, Portland, Oregon

Subject Folklore (Mining)

Name and address of informant Hank Simms, Old Fellows' House 32nd & Holgate, Portland, Oregon

Comment: Mr. Simms is one of eighty residents in this home for aged people, and if he is a good sample of the rest of the residents the place should be a valuable source of material. One of the requirements for entrance into the home is a long residence in this state, and the type of people eligible for the home are of good sound middle-class stock. They have kept up their lodge dues and lived in one place long enough to know it well. Mr. Simms' references to the place as a poorhouse are a touch of his own, and it is doubtful if he really thinks he is in one. It is merely his way of lifting the place out of the ordinary. There are at least two other residents with mining backgrounds. Also there are 26 women. Interviewing is simple because of the privacy allowed by the private rooms and the [eagerness?] of

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the people to talk to someone from the outside. Mr. Simms, as has been pointed out elsewhere is a valuable store of information on mines and mining. [Even?] at his advanced age people still come to him for advice. He is going to give me the names of other people in his business.

### 2

While interviewing Mr. Simms, and listening to him tell about the workman of the old West, it struck me that such men are most likely to be found in places like the [Odd Fellow?] home. The majority of men who worked in the mines and construction camps of the early days are not the type who now own property and have [an?] income. Indeed it would have gone against their scruples to have acquired either. As Mr. Simms says, they were journeymen who [looked?] on a long residence in one place as a sign of weakness. By moving from job to job where they either had to 'put up or shut up', they were kept on their toes and the men who could walk into any [camp?], take any job, and handle it skillfully was a man to be looked up to. A great deal of the color in [these?] [man's?] lives consisted of doing that. It was in this way that Mr. Simms became a tool dresser (all hardrock miners in the early days out their own steel) a timber man, powder man, assayer, practical engineer, and an all around mining man. All of the stories he told me had [as?] their dramatic climax the [journeyman's?] skill in triumph over the [homeguard?], greenhorn, or "high collar".

Obviously the day of such a man has passed, and passed many years back, and so there is little to discredit such a man for being in a home for the aged[.?] If he, and his kind, had followed the economic [precepts?] of the righteous souls who have had the funds to endow historical institutions and publish [memoirs?], the West would not have been built. It [seems?] to this interviewer that Mr. Simms represents a portion of the folk life that is as important as that of his homeguard brethren, and that his kind should not be penalized because of their lack of [frugality?] and righteousness.